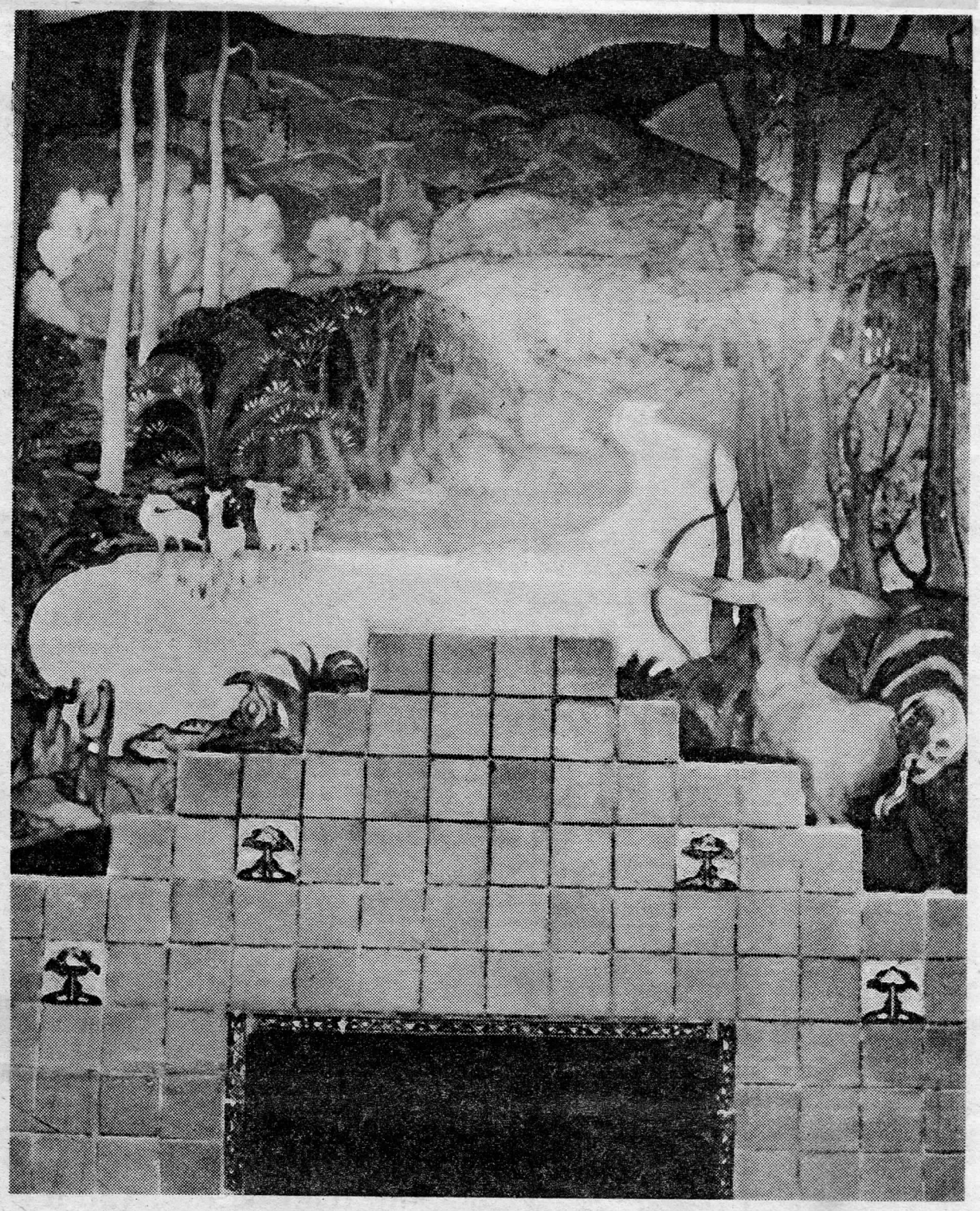
Old Mural Found In Carmel



This old Seideneck mural was uncovered when a false wall was removed in the renovation of a shop in the Seven Arts Court in Carmel. The painting is the work of George Seideneck, the tiles around the fireplace that of his wife, Catherine.

Seidenecks' Work Discovered Under False Wall

By BETTY HOAG McGLYNN
Herald Special Writer

A little Carmel history, redolent with Daisy Bostick-style nostalgia, was literally uncovered recently.

Proprietors of a new shop in the Seven Arts Court decided to redecorate and, finding that the south wall of the room had been boarded over, they obtained permission from the building's owners to investigate.

As plank after plank was removed, a sprightly mural began to emerge: in art nouveau landscape a centaur crossbowman aims his arrow at a group of snow-white deer. Below the mural there was a fireplace with breast of glazed blue tiles, some decorative with stylized flowers.

A local artist, Carmel Art Association member Glenn O. Powell, was asked to clean and repair the neglected painting. The reward of all this labor is one of the finest examples of craftsman-style art in Carmel, executed by a famous husband-and-wife team who lived in this area during the 1920-70s period: Catherine and George Seideneck.

The mural was painted by George, while the ceramic bricks were handmade and show the artistry of Catherine, who was Roycroft-trained.

The two-story Seven Arts Court building is on the west side of Lincoln, occupying the corner at Ocean Avenue. It has always been a favorite with tourists because of its "quaintness." The building was constructed in 1925 by Herbert Heron and his wife Helena. It cost them $23,300, a munificent sum in those days. It was a complex of small studios and shops surrounding a brick-paved patio which boasted a charming little wishing well.

It was the archetype of intimate and "arty" miniature shopping malls which are still being built in Carmel. Polk's Monterey County Directory of 1926 states that "the Seven Arts Building was the original of Carmel's famous shops . . . the first devoted to things of beauty and utility instead of utility alone."

The name was said to have come from an old European phrase referring to architecture, dancing, drama, literature, music, painting and sculpture.

Herbert Heron maintained several of the rooms for various businesses of his own. In 1926 he opened a book store in the southeast corner shop where the Seideneck mural-fireplace was found. Today the room is Touch'n Go, a leather and suede fashion shop owned by Rosemary Tomasi and Goldie Howell.

Throughout the years many interesting businesses have been housed in the Seven Arts. When Heron was interviewed by this writer in 1967 he mentioned that the large northern wing of the building, in particular, had had a notable lineage of artist-renters.

According to Heron, the Carmel Art Institute was born in this studio on April 9, 1936, when Kit Whitman, Paul Whitman and Armin Hansen organized the school. Other early teachers there were Burton S. Boundey, Robert Bruckman and Marie Harte. Two years later Pat and John Cunningham took over the school which Cunningham still directs. It is said to be the oldest art school operating under the same name in Northern California.

An upper room of the Seven Arts Court was the first home of the Carmel Art Association. Shortly after the group was formed on August 8, 1927, it voted to pay Heron $40 a month for use of the space. After installing a wood-burning stove, covering the walls with burlap and spending $80 for "suitable antique decorations," the members proudly displayed their paintings at a reception on Oct. 15, 1927. At that time, Mrs. Nellie Comstock (mother of Catherine Seideneck) became a patron by the gift of a sum of $500; it was nucleus of a building fund. George Seideneck was elected the second president of the association in August, 1928, and he put emphasis on the importance of saving money for a permament headquarters. It was difficult.

By the end of July the following year, it was obvious that the group no longer could afford to pay any rent; they moved out of the Seven Arts Building and held meetings in the homes of members.

As the Great Depression spread its shadows over the country, many drastic expedients were employed to keep the Carmel Art Association alive. Eventually its members were able to purchase a property on Dolores Street (where they are still located).

Articles of Incorporation were drawn up at the February meeting in 1934; at that time Mrs. Comstock was still the lone patron. During all those years George Seideneck had consistently served on the board — in 1927, 1930, 1931, 1932 — as well as being President in 1928.

Although both Mr. and Mrs. Seideneck studied at the Chicago Art Institute in their youth, they did not meet until 1918 when they chanced to be in Carmel.

George was born Feb. 4, 1885, at Prague, into a family which had been engaged in architectural work for at least 200 years, building castles in Bohemia (an art form which never attracted him, Seideneck told this writer in a 1967 interview). His surname is Czechoslovakian and means "silk corner," although the artist had no idea what that might connote.

His full name is imposing: George Joseph Lewis Carl Burnhardt Seideneck. Understandably he dropped use of the middle four when he moved to Chicago as a young man. There he trained as an apprentice engraver, carving wood blocks for a year or

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so. George spent the next two or three years studying at Smith's Art Academy, a short-lived Chicago institution which attracted many important students in its time.

After further work at the Chicago Art Academy, George left in 1911 for art training in Europe. His first year was spent at St. Ives, a little seaport town in Cornwall, England. Seideneck not only painted landscapes there, but also taught himself the importance of the camera which he had brought with him: finding it disconcerting to have fishermen lower their boats' sails while he was in the middle of capturing a scene, George learned to snap a picture of his landscape (or marine) for future reference. It was a practice he continued all his life.

The year 1912 found George Seideneck in Germany studying at the Royal Academy in Munich under Carl von Marr and taking private lessons from Walter Thor. Returning to Chicago, George embarked upon a career as portrait painter. Although successful as far as his many clients were concerned, George himself was bored with the work. He retreated into the commercial world to become a fashion delineator of men's clothing, drawing advertisements for newspapers and magazines.

As European representative for the world's largest fashion house, Meyer-Roth, George Seideneck was called upon to open new offices in London and Paris. He visited Germany, his beloved St. Ives, and Italy where he married briefly; the outbreak of World War I contributed to an end of the affair. George arrived in London on August 4, 1914, the day Great Britain declared war against Germany. He was lucky to be able to return to the United States safely, on the next-to-the-last voyage of the Lusitania.

Back in Chicago, the artist began a 3½-year teaching stint at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and at the Academy of Design there. At this time George Seideneck became a member of several prestigious Chicagoan clubs: the Art Club, Society of Artists, and Palette and Chisel Club.

Springtime, 1918, George went on a sketching trip to the West Coast. He arrived in Carmel in March, bringing a letter of introduction to sculptor Jo Mora.

Seideneck had planned to remain in Carmel for only three months, but he soon shredded his return ticket and remained on the Peninsula until his death 54 years later.

Among the people he met soon after his arrival in Carmel was Catherine Comstock, and she may have influenced his decision to remain; they were married three years later.

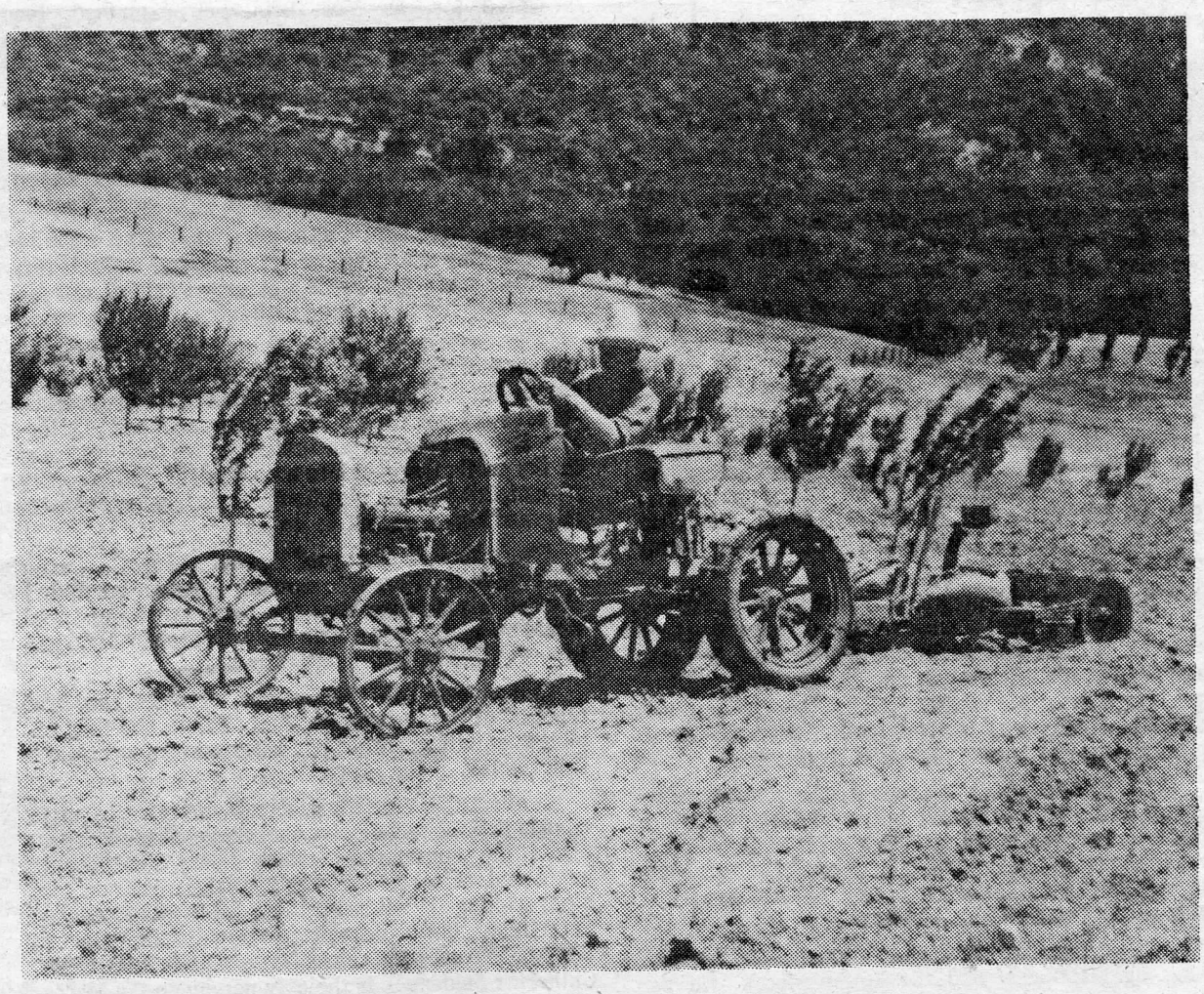
On Nov. 1, 1886, Catherine Comstock was born at Evanston, Ill. Her initial art training was a year and a half at Elbert Hubbard's famous Roycroft Shop of East Aurora, New York. Here outstanding craftsmen (most of them European-trained) taught such subjects as weaving, pottery-making, metal-smithing, book-binding, jewelry design and execution.

Catherine's most important instructor was Kranz, world-renowned for his leather work. The next several years Catherine spent in and out of the studios of leading Chicago artists, painters and sculptors, as both student and friend. She also studied at the Chicago Art Institute, becoming proficient in watercolor and pastel in addition to her craftsman accomplishments. In 1912 Catherine won a gold medal at the Washington State Fair.

The Comstock family moved to California in 1915. That very year Catherine Comstock was given a signal honor: she was commissioned to make a sculptured leather over-mantel for the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. It was one of only two leather objects displayed at the fair. Furthermore, a fireplace was constructed especially to display the art nouveau scene of peacocks and parrots in a garden. Catherine won a coveted gold medal for her entry.

Catherine was a student and also taught at the Oakland School of Fine Arts and Crafts, as well as at the University of California at Berkeley. During the summers she came to Carmel and conducted classes in jewelry-making and leather-working at Carmel School of Arts and Crafts.

Talent thrived in the Comstock family. One of Catherine's brothers, Dr. John Adam Comstock, was an osteopath by profession but a painter and craftsman by hobby. Shortly after the family settled in Santa Rosa, Catherine helped Dr. John establish a crafts guild. They called it The Companeros ("The Friends"). Catherine supervised the guild for some time, and also made fine sculptured jewelry.



Although it took much hard work to complete the buildings, both George and Catherine Seideneck loved their little ranch in Carmel Valley. This old photo shows George piloting a tractor he made out of a Model T Ford and parts picked up here and there.

Another Comstock brother, Hugh W., located in Carmel in 1924, marrying a local miss named Mayotta Brown that same year. Mayotta was the creator of a line of rag dolls which she named 'Otsy Totsy." Hugh was a building contractor, and when Mayotta asked him for something appropriate to display her wares, Hugh designed a Hansel-and-Gretel type building which they erected in the oaks woods of northeast Carmel, completing it in January, 1925.

Long ago sold to artist Pedro Lemos, the building was moved to Dolores Street near 7th. About 1927 it was a restaurant known as "Sally's," and today, as "The Tuck Box," it is one of Carmel-by-the-Sea's major tourist attractions.

Although Hugh Comstock is doomed to be remembered locally for his doll houses, in the broad field of architecture he is famous as the inventor of an ingenious form of building construction, Post-Adobe, which he registered as a trademark in 1948.

Finally, Catherine's sister Cornelia became Mrs. W. C. Matthew; her only daughter is today a practicing artist who lives in the State of Washington.

Although Catherine Comstock and George Seideneck had met in the spring of 1918, they did not marry until 1921. Catherine had gone to Santa Rosa to visit her parents that Christmas, remaining on in January. George joined her and they were wed on the 25th. It seems to have been a surprise to the community since the Pine Cone had only noted that he had "gone to San Francisco for business reasons." Sometime before the summer of 1922 the couple established a home at the corner of Monte Verde and 8th. At this time George was working as staff artist for the coastal laboratories of the Carnegie Institute in Carmel, in its Department of Botanical Research.

During the early years of their marriage the Seidenecks shared a business of buying houses, redecorating and selling them. They were in demand as decorators for other people, too, and Catherine once recalled happily that "decorating almost always led to an over-mantel."

Certainly the Seidenecks' most fascinating project must have taken place in 1922 when they decorated the villa Casa del Mar Azul, one of the truly fabulous houses of Carmel. It was the realized dream of a charming woman whose memory is intertwined with Carmel's cultural history: Marie (Mrs. Phil) Gordon is credited with having inaugurated the Carmel Circuses which were a delight to the early Bohemian community, and she initiated early-day music recitals.

While the Seidenecks were completing their work for Mrs. Gordon the summer of 1922, many exciting events were taking place in Carmel. July 20th was designated "Serra Day," and there were pageants celebrating the opening day sale ($350-$400) of lots in Carmel Woods, the Del Monte development engineered by the Carmel Realty Company. That afternoon Jo Mora's wooden statue of Father Serra was carried in a great parade to the Woods and installed with suitable ceremonies at the spiderweb intersection of five streets. In the evening a play about the padre was produced in Forest Theater; it had been especially written for the occasion by Garnet Holme.

Mary Austin arrived from New York for this event and declared that she "heartily approved." The

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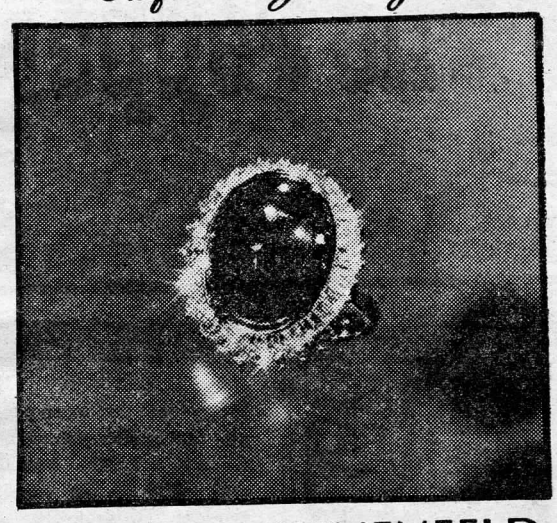
"Exquisite Jewelry"



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molds. Catherine's stunning carved leather overmantel from the 1915 Fair graced one wall. Everywhere were treasures the Seidenecks had brought back from Europe.

The last structure built on the Seideneck property was the studio. The building was set at some distance from the main house and stood on the edge of the ravine, with a lovely view. On the ground floor was George's photographic laboratory and the guest room which he called the "cogitating room." Above, the 22' x 30' painting studio was used mostly by Catherine.

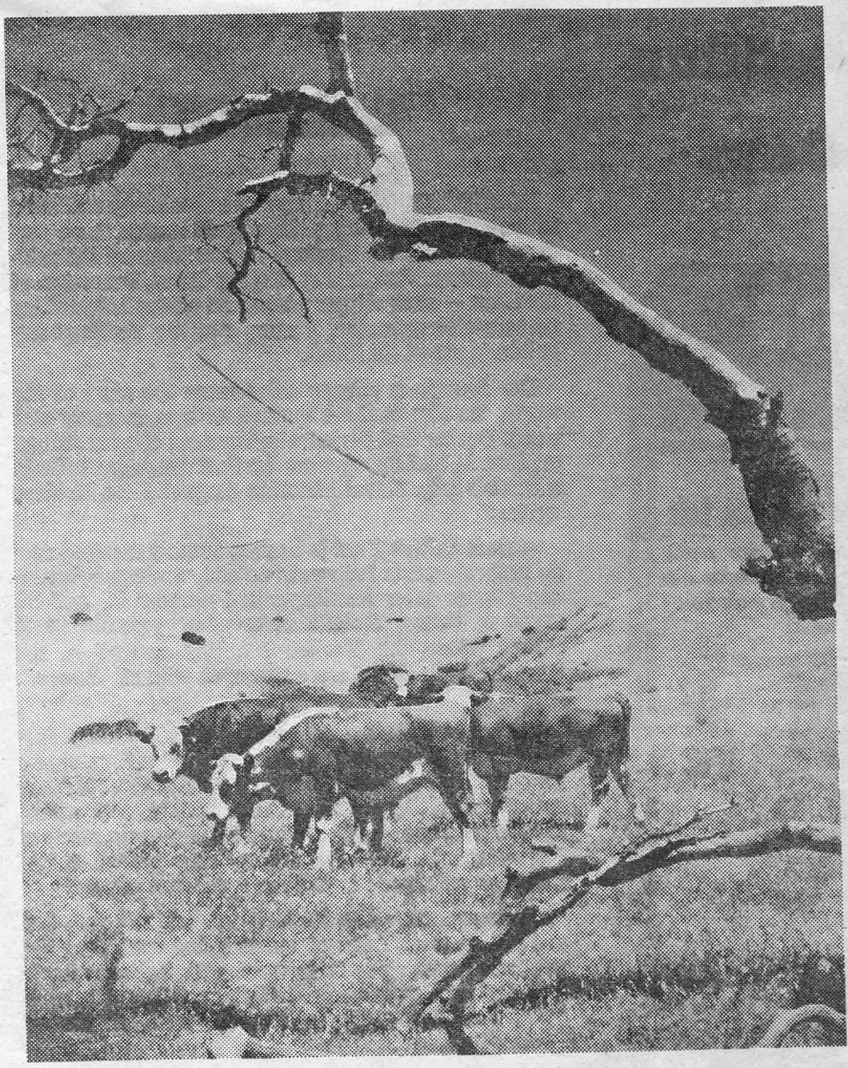
Catherine Comstock Seideneck died February 13, 1967, following a long illness. By that time the couple had sold much of the land around the house. On October of the next year a fire broke out in the kitchen, and before firemen could control the blaze most of the antiques were destroyed and the lovely built-in handwork was gutted.

George Seideneck continued to live on alone at the Miramonte Road home until his own death March 7, 1972. The house, on land reduced now to 3.84 acres, was sold on Feburary 9, 1973, in "as is" condition, at public auction in which "any bids over $77,500 will be accepted."

One can categorize Catherine and George Seideneck as important in the early Monterey Peninsula art colony, members and contributors to activities of the Carmel Arts and Crafts Club, the Carmel Art Association, the Golden Bough and Forest Theaters. They also exhibited regularly in communities other than Carmel: at the Monterey County Fair, at Stanford University, at San Francisco (for the Society of Western Artists), and at Santa Cruz.

Among their friends and fellow-exhibitors are the well-known names of William P. Silva, Ferdinand Burgdorff, Jo Mora, Thomas A. McGlynn, Laura Maxwell, Burton S. Boundey, Armin Hansen, Myron Oliver, Charlotte E. and M. DeNeale Morgan, Elizabeth Strong, E. Charlton Fortune, Arthur Hill Gilbert, John O'Shea, William C. Watts, William Ritschel.

Examples of the Seideneck art can be found today in such public collections as those of the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, the Monterey History and Art Association, the Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art. □



Pastoral scene in Carmel Valley was photographed many years ago by artist George Seideneck.